Newsletter of the North Dakota Nonpoint Source Pollution Task Force

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Long Brothers Receive National Recognition for Conservation Efforts

submitted by Bob Flath, Cottonwood Creek watershed coordinator

The Long brothers and their families

Mike and Richard Long of Berlin, N.D., received a Core 4 Conservation Award Feb. 5, 2002, at the National Association of of Conservation Districts annual meeting in Sparks, Nev.

The Core 4 Conservation Awards recognize producers who implement a system of conservation practices that not only protect or improve natural resources but also enhance farm profitability.

Core 4 Conservation is a national agricultural conservation awareness campaign that promotes using a systems approach to addressing economic and environmental concerns in agriculture. This innovative approach to ag management results in better soil, cleaner water, greater profits and a brighter future.

The Core 4 Conservation Awards are sponsored by Syngenta, Capital Agricultural Property Services, Inc., IMC Global, the Conservation Technology Information Center and the National Association of Conservation Districts.

Background

The Long brothers live within the boundaries of Cottonwood Creek watershed, which eventually drains into Lake LaMoure. The portion of Cottonwood Creek watershed that drains into Lake LaMoure covers about 107,000 acres. Agricultural production (small grains, row crops, livestock) is the primary land use within the watershed.

Lake LaMoure is one of the main water-based recreational sites for the residents of LaMoure County and southeastern North Dakota. To ensure long-term maintenance of the fishery and recreational uses of the lake, the LaMoure County Soil Conservation District (SCD) initiated a water quality improvement project in the Cottonwood Creek watershed in 1997. Financial support for the project and associated staff has been awarded through Section 319 (h) of the Clean Water Act. Additional partners providing financial and/or technical assistance have included the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Natural Resources Trust, LaMoure County Water Resources Board and several other local entities.

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The primary goal of the Cottonwood Creek Watershed Project is to reduce the delivery of nutrients and sediments from agricultural lands to the creek and Lake LaMoure. This is being accomplished by providing financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers in the watershed to implement a variety of best management practices. The Long brothers were some of the first producers to work with the Cottonwood Creek watershed staff to help address the goals of the project, as well as improve resource management on their farm.

A Successful Enterprise

The Long brothers work with several different aspects in their operation. The brothers integrate a small grain and row crop farm with pasture, hayland and a feedlot. The brothers recently installed a feedlot containment system. Their goal is to produce all the feed that is needed on their own and market the beef cattle.

The Long brothers also recently planted nearly 230 acres of cropland back to a mix of native and introduced grasses for grazing. Cross-fencing and grazing management are very important to them, as they understand the ramifications that come with overgrazing. The area that was planted back to grass includes parts of the Cottonwood Creek riparian zone that helps to protect water quality in the stream and can supply the cattle with a cleaner source of water.

Production of another commodity has become evident on the Long brothers' farm in the form of large piles of manure. Proper placement and utilization of the manure is important to them as it takes the place of commercial fertilizers that would need to be purchased.

The Long brothers also utilize conservation tillage and no-till when it fits into their rotations. Utilizing no-till can be difficult when placement of manure for fertilizer requires incorporation, but it is still used whenever possible. The concept of "farm the best and leave the rest" also is employed. Property that was low in production and difficult to farm due to wet conditions has been placed in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Through a wide array of conservation practices, the Long brothers always are working toward better soil health. They have installed many practices over the last two or three years alone. These include 26,000 feet of field windbreak, six acres of farmstead windbreak, six acres of grassed waterways, 230 acres of reestablished pasture and cross fencing on those acres. The Long brothers also plant and market alfalfa, which provides more cover and rehabilitates soil that is stressed from continuous cropping.

Soil in their lowest production fields is now being given a break to allow it to return to a more natural condition by being placed in the CRP Program and allowed to rest for 10 years. Taking the initiative to do these practices and to give up farmland to the CRP program recently resulted in special recognition. The Long brothers were named the 2000 Soil Conservation Award Winners by the LaMoure County SCD.

The greatest accomplishment for achieving cleaner water is the Long brothers' containment system for feedlot runoff. Through the local Section 319 Watershed Program, they were able to construct a system that contains all the runoff from their livestock feeding area. All of the practices installed on cropland also assist with providing cleaner water within the region. A large majority of the Longs' land borders the Cottonwood Creek and can be a direct source of pollution to the creek and all neighboring producers downstream. The nutrients that can leave the land through runoff are essential nutrients for plant growth and are best left on the land for crop production. Harmful bacteria found in manure are contained in the containment pond. Proper application and incorporation of the manure is key to keeping these pollutants from surface and ground water.

There are many ways in which profitability is affected by the conservation practices being utilized on the Long brothers' farm. The most obvious is the better management incorporated at the time the containment system was constructed. Mounds were integrated into the lots for dry areas on which cattle can rest. Cement pads from the mounds to the waterers and the feedlanes allow cattle to move from rest to feeding with little effort.

Cropland practices such as utilizing the CRP program to rest unproductive land can pay better than farming the land. Conservation tillage and no-till show reductions in input by reducing the number of tillage passes, thereby saving on fuel and repair expenses. Utilizing cattle in a good grazing system can provide income. Utilizing manure produced on-site to replace

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The Long brothers constructed this livestock waste containment system.

commercial fertilizers saves money and completes one of the circles of nature. Producing feed for beef cattle in close proximity to the feeding area reduces shipping costs and can be less costly than purchasing commercial feed.

Looking to the Future

The Long brothers both have children who may one day take over the farm and continue where their fathers leave off, much like Mike and Richard have done. Concern about the future is probably the most important reason that Mike and Richard are keeping conservation on their minds at all times. The condition of the land now will determine the condition of the land in years to come. All of the natural resource issues that the Long brothers approach while farming must provide for the future, and most people would like for that future to be brighter.

Plan Now for New Projects

Each year, the North Dakota Department of Health is eligible to receive about $5 million in Section 319 funding to support state and local nonpoint source (NPS) pollution control projects. These projects may include water quality assessments, "one-on-one" planning assistance for producers, best management practice cost sharing, and public education. The specific goals, objectives and costs of each project are described in detail in the project implementation plans (PIPs). PIPs and associated Section 319 funding requests are evaluated by the Department of Health and the NPS Pollution Task Force during an annual review held every October.

Development of local Section 319 PIPs takes a considerable amount of time and effort. Activities preceding the actual writing of the PIP may include securing partnerships, soliciting matching funds, identifying NPS pollution management needs, surveying producers, etc. Depending upon its complexity, it may not be too late to have your project considered in this year's review. For assistance or to obtain more information about Section 319 funding, contact Greg Sandness or Jim Collins at 701.328.5210.

Project application deadline is July 1, 2002.

North Dakota Department of Health Announces New NPS Website

The North Dakota Department of Health has a new website addressing nonpoint source pollution issues.

To get more information on NPS subjects or to view past issues of the *Quality Water* newsletter, go to:

http://www.health.state.nd.us/ndhd/environ/wq/nps/

Upcoming Events

June 23-28, 2002
Project WET -- Lewis & Clark Big Muddy: Missouri River Cultural History Institute, Washburn, N.D.

July 22-26, 2002
Project WET -- Summer Water Quality Institute for Teachers, Washburn, N.D.

Please contact Jim Collins at 701.328.5161 for more information about these events.

And the Survey Says...

In early April of this year, a Gallup poll on the environment showed that water issues top the list of concerns for Americans. Eighty-five percent of respondents said they personally worry a “great deal” or a “fair amount” about the pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs. In summary, respondents worry a “great deal” or “fair amount” about:

- Pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs - 85 percent
- Pollution of drinking water - 82 percent
- Contamination of soil and water by toxic waste - 82 percent
- Air pollution - 78 percent
- Maintenance of the nation’s supply of fresh water for household needs - 78 percent
- Damage to the earth’s ozone layer - 67 percent
- The loss of tropical rain forests - 65 percent
- Extinction of plant and animal species - 65 percent
- The “greenhouse effect” or global warming - 58 percent
- Acid rain - 48 percent

For more information about the poll go to:

http://www.gallup.com/poll/specialReports/pollSummaries/sr010416.asp

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